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## ABSTRACT

Five hundred twenty-two Anglo, 99 Black and 127 Chicano sixth-graders, in 53 classes were individually rated by randomized, tri-ethnic, classmate panels on work habits, self-control and interpersonal behavior. Self-ratings and achievement tests were also obtained. Analysis of variance tested for ethnic effects in raters, ratees and rater-ratee interaction (ethnic bias). No bias was found. All raters ranked Anglos high, Chicanos next, and Blacks below average (mean scores). Achievement tests and self-ratings yielded the same rank order. Peer rating gave a fair, valid picture of individual behavior. By unbiased evidence, including their own, Blacks had weightier problems. (Author)

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IS THERE ETHNIC BIAS IN PEER APPRAISALS IN TRI-ETHNIC CLASSES?

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# Is There Ethnic Bias in Peer Appraisals in Tri-Ethnic Classes?

(HYP)

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522 Anglo, 99 Black and 127 Chicano six-graders, in 53 classes, were individually rated by randomized, tri-ethnic, classmate panels on work habits, self-control and interpersonal behavior. Self-ratings and achievement tests were also obtained. Analysis of variance tested for ethnic effects in raters, ratees and rater-ratee interaction (ethnic bias). No bias was found. All raters ranked Anglos high, Chicanos next, and Blacks below average (mean scores). Achievement tests and self-ratings yielded the same rank order. Peer rating gave a fair, valid picture of individual behavior. By unbiased evidence, including their own, Blacks had weightier problems.

Is There Ethnic Bias in Peer Appraisals  
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Peer appraisals of student behavior and performance have proven to have useful validity and economy in many studies, for more than thirty years. Most of the school studies that used peer appraisals were conducted in ethnically homogeneous classrooms, however. As American classrooms become increasingly heterogeneous, the possibility arises that the validity of peer assessments may be impaired because of bias, where a given ethnic group systematically tends to give either more or less favorable ratings to its own members than to classmates of different ethnicity.

This study examined this possibility, using 53 tri-ethnic classes of sixth graders. Each class contained Anglo, Black, and Chicano students in roughly a 65:20:15 ratio, corresponding to the ethnic ratio in the total population of Austin, Texas. (The order is alphabetical.) Each student in these classes was rated by a randomly-selected set of nine classmates on eleven scales: figures out own problems, keeps his temper, does not push to get his own way, gets along with teachers, dependable, quiet-calm, has good ideas of his own, kind, gets along with students, works hard, does not get upset easily. These scales, when intercorrelated, yield a single, general factor we call "school adjustment." Since unweighted raw scores, z-transformed scores, and factor-weighted scores all correlate above .95, we use a "school adjustment" score that weights the eleven scale-scores equally.

"Ratees" accepted for this study were all students who had been rated by classmates of all three ethnic groups. This gave a sample of 522 Anglo, 99 Black and 127 Chicano ratees. "Raters" were the students who rated the ratees (usually more than one ratee per rater). Classified by ethnicity, there were 3,825 Anglo, 1,211 Black, and 1,341 Chicano "raters;" or, more accurately, this many ratings by members of these ethnic groups.

Additional information used in this study included a self-rating by each student using the same eleven scales, and pre-and-post-year scores on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills.

A one-within, one-between analysis of variance with an unweighted means solution (Winer 1971) was chosen since it is the generally accepted method of analyzing repeated measures designs with unequal N's. "Rater" was the repeated measure, since each ratee was rated by three sets of raters.

In this analysis three significance tests were made.

- (1) Main effect for ratee: this test signified whether or not ethnic groups received different mean ratings. A significant main effect here does not represent bias.
- (2) Main effect for rater: this test signified whether the different ethnic groups tended to give different mean ratings, regardless of who they rated. This main effect also does not represent bias.
- (3) An ethnic bias would show up in the interaction of rater and ratee. If the interaction is significant it means that a student's score depended upon both the ethnic makeup of his raters and his own ethnicity.

The most important finding is that none of the three ethnic groups showed any ethnic bias in the way they rated their classmates, although there was a large, systematic difference in the ranking of the three ethnic groups by all raters. Anglos gave lower ratings, on the average, than did Blacks or Chicanos but this applied equally to all ratees, regardless of ethnicity. They rated Anglos highest, Chicanos above average and Blacks below average. Blacks did give slightly higher ratings to Blacks than did Anglo, or Chicano raters but this difference was not statistically significant. Furthermore, Blacks' mean rating of Blacks was below the mean for the whole population, whereas they rated Anglos very high and Chicanos high above the population mean. Chicanos also rated Anglos highest, with Chicanos a close second, both far above the population mean; they rated Blacks below average.

Thus, there was a significant "rater" effect, mainly the tendency of Anglos to give more conservative ratings to all ratees. There was a significant "ratee" effect, in that all raters ranked Anglos highest, Chicanos a close second, and Blacks below average on "school adjustment." There was, however, no significant interaction of rater ethnicity with ratee ethnicity: no ethnic bias.

Ethnic bias, in this population, does not impair the validity of peer assessments. The self-ratings and achievement scores in the total research population further tend to support the validity of the peer ratings. Anglos had the highest self-ratings, Chicanos were a close second, and Blacks were lowest in their self-ratings. Self-ratings, understandably, were higher than the average peer ratings for these groups. The elevation of self-rating over peer rating was least among the Chicanos, almost as small among the Anglos, and very much greater among the Blacks, whose self-ratings were almost twice as high as their peer ratings. Overall, the ethnic groups' ranking by self-rating was the same as by peer rating.

The same was true of their achievement test scores. Anglos scored highest, Chicanos substantially lower, and Blacks lowest, at both the beginning and the end of the year.

Two important implications seem to follow from this pattern of evidence. First, when given the task of describing individual classmates these sixth-graders, most of whom were in integrated classrooms for the first time, did not exhibit an irrational ethnic bias. Unquestionably, there may be special circumstances in some communities where intense conflict over desegregation might cause students to color their perceptions of classmates. In this sample however, the children seem to be objective and fair in their assessments. Their peer ratings, on the whole, provide a valid description of school adjustment and performance.

The findings also indicate that many more Black students have a hard time adjusting to school, socially as well as academically, than do Anglo or Chicano students. This finding has a direct bearing on a charge just levied against the school district by a branch of HEW. Proportionately more minority children than Anglo students were disciplined by the school staff in the past year. HEW representatives moved from this fact to the interpretive conclusion that the school staff are acting in an unreasonable, ethnically biased way. The present data (like detailed observational data which have also been collected) strongly suggest that a more appropriate interpretation of the discipline statistics would be that more Black children do, in fact, present discipline problems.

... .

Their classmates, and they themselves, report that a larger proportion of Black students have problems in dealing with schoolwork, in maintaining stable control of their feelings (particularly aggressive feelings), and in relating to both classmates and teachers. If the ethnic disproportion in disciplinary actions reflects a higher incidence of behavior problems in the Black group, at this time, the problem cannot be solved merely by enjoining teachers to be more fair. Solutions will have to be sought by finding and dealing with the real causes for students' difficulties in personal, social and academic adjustment.